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The situation in the Middle East

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains replies received from Member States in response to the note verbale by the Secretary-General of 2 May 2016 concerning implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions 70/16, entitled "Jerusalem", and 70/17, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 70/16 and 70/17. In its resolution 70/16, the Assembly stressed that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the City of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by people of all religions and nationalities. In its resolution 70/17, which deals with Israeli policies in the Syrian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, the Assembly demanded once more that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

2. On 2 May, in order to fulfil my reporting responsibility under resolutions 70/16 and 70/17, I addressed notes verbales to the Permanent Representative of Israel and to the Permanent Representatives of all other States Members of the United Nations requesting them to inform me of any steps their Governments had taken or envisaged taking concerning implementation of the relevant provisions of those resolutions. As at 15 August 2016, six replies had been received from the State of Palestine, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Morocco and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). The replies are reproduced in section II of the present report.

II. Replies received from Member States

State of Palestine

[Original: English]

Resolution 70/16, entitled "Jerusalem", represents an important contribution by the General Assembly towards justly resolving this core issue of the question of Palestine, in conformity with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, both by the General Assembly and the Security Council, and with due respect for the advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice. The above-mentioned resolution continues to receive the overwhelming support of States, adopted by the General Assembly at its 64th plenary meeting, on 24 November 2015, by a vote of 153 in favour and only 7 against, with 8 abstentions.

Resolution 70/16 reaffirmed the long-standing, principled international position regarding the City of Jerusalem. Year after year, the General Assembly has reaffirmed that the international community has a legitimate interest in the question of the City of Jerusalem and in the protection of the unique spiritual, religious and cultural dimensions of the City, as foreseen in relevant United Nations resolutions on the matter. Moreover, year after year the Assembly has reiterated "its determination that any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever", and has called upon Israel "to immediately cease all such illegal and unilateral measures".

All legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that have altered or purported to alter the character and status of

the Holy City of Jerusalem, in particular the so-called "Basic Law" on Jerusalem, are considered null and void. This includes all measures intended to deliberately change the demography, character and geographic landscape of the City, including, for example, the continuing and systematic illegal transfer of Israeli settlers to the City by the occupying Power; the confiscation of Palestinian property, particularly for the construction and expansion of settlements and the wall in and around the City; the demolition of Palestinian homes and eviction of Palestinian residents in the City, forcibly displacing them, particularly Bedouin families, thousands of whom live under the ongoing threat of forced transfer by the occupying Power; the revocation of residency rights of Palestinians in the City; and other measures such as excavations in the City, and particularly in and around holy sites, and the imposition of military checkpoints all around Occupied East Jerusalem, severing it from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The General Assembly recalls the Security Council resolutions relevant to Jerusalem, including resolution 478 (1980), in which the Council, inter alia, decided not to recognize the so-called "Basic Law" on Jerusalem and called for it, along with all other measures to alter the character and status of the City, to be rescinded forthwith. This non-recognition of the so-called "Basic Law" on Jerusalem has been upheld by the international community until this day in rejection of any and all measures by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at the illegal de facto annexation of East Jerusalem, the status of which remains that of occupied territory and to which the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War is fully applicable. That status and the Geneva Convention's applicability are, furthermore, both determinations that have been repeatedly reaffirmed by the General Assembly and the Security Council and were unequivocally confirmed by the International Court of Justice.

That Occupied East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 has also been repeatedly reaffirmed in relevant resolutions. Moreover, numerous resolutions have clearly determined that the status of East Jerusalem and the rest of Palestinian territory and other Arab lands occupied by Israel since 1967 remains that of occupied territories, and that in no way has Israel become the sovereign over these territories and that its status and obligations are those of an occupying Power. Moreover, the international principle and legal norm prohibiting the acquisition of territory by force has been repeatedly reaffirmed in this regard.

Owing to Israel's continuous, flagrant and systematic violations of resolution 478 (1980) and all other resolutions regarding Jerusalem, including resolution 70/16, and the applicable provisions of international law, including humanitarian law, the situation on the ground continued to decline in the past year, exacerbating the already-high tensions and deepening resentment, frustration and hardship among the Palestinian people. As such, the General Assembly was compelled, as reflected in the preamble of the resolution, to again express its grave concern, inter alia, about the continuation by Israel of illegal settlement activities, including measures to implement the so-called "E-1 plan", its construction of the wall, its demolition of Palestinian homes, its restrictions on Palestinian access to and residence in East Jerusalem and its isolation from the rest of Palestine, all of which are having a vastly detrimental impact on the lives of the Palestinian civilian population.

Illegal actions by the occupying Power in the City, as well as by Israeli settlers and extremists, have also stoked religious sensitivities in the recent period and gravely destabilized the situation. Israeli occupying forces have escalated their use of force against Palestinian civilian residents of the City, including against children and youth, who have also been among the thousands arrested and detained by the occupying Power in the recent period. Moreover, Palestinians in Jerusalem have been among the more than 200 Palestinian civilians killed by the occupying forces since the escalation of violence that began in October 2015, and among the more than 17,000 injured in that period by the occupying forces and by the violence and terror of Israeli settlers.

Tensions reached extremely high levels in September and October 2015 owing to such violence and repeated provocations and incitement, including frequent incursions by Jewish extremists and Israeli occupying forces at the Haram al-Sharif, which houses the Holy Aqsa Mosque; acts of vandalism by Israeli settlers, including desecration of mosques and churches in the City and other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and provocative rhetoric by Israeli Government officials, religious leaders and right-wing extremists regarding the Haram al-Sharif. This prompted the Security Council to issue a press statement on the situation in Jerusalem, on 17 September 2015, in which the Council members, inter alia, "expressed their grave concern regarding escalating tensions in Jerusalem, especially surrounding the Haram al-Sharif compound, including recent clashes in and around the site"; "called for the exercise of restraint, refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric, and upholding unchanged the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif — in word and in practice"; and "called for full respect for international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as may be applicable in Jerusalem".

This was followed, on 30 September 2015, by a statement by the principals of the Middle East Quartet, in which they also expressed deep concern about "recent violence and escalating tensions surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and called upon all parties to exercise restraint, refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric, and preserve unchanged the status quo at the holy sites in both word and practice". Furthermore, in view of the grave impact of illegal Israeli policies and measures in particular, including in Occupied East Jerusalem, the Quartet was compelled to express "its serious concern that current trends on the ground — including continued acts of violence against Palestinians and Israelis, ongoing settlement activity and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures — are dangerously imperilling the viability of a two-State solution".

The General Assembly legislated similar provisions in resolution 70/16, whereby it expressed grave concern "about tensions, provocations and incitement regarding the holy places of Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif", and urged, in the light of those negative developments, "restraint and respect for the sanctity of the holy sites by all sides". Moreover, the resolution clearly calls for "respect for the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif, in word and practice, and urges all sides to work immediately and cooperatively to defuse tensions and halt all provocations, incitement and violence at the holy sites in the City".

Whereas Israel, the occupying Power, has continuously and flagrantly violated United Nations resolutions and the applicable provisions of international law, and

whereas Israeli Government officials, including members of the Israeli Prime Minister's Cabinet, continue to provoke and incite with regard to Jerusalem, the Palestinian Government has consistently acted with seriousness, responsibility and restraint to address this critical situation and uphold its legal obligations in this regard, in conformity with the relevant resolutions and international law. Such efforts have been undertaken in spite of the deliberate and blatant Israeli obstruction of access by the Palestinian Government to the City and the occupation's obstruction of Palestinian development in the City. In this regard, we must also draw attention to the fact that numerous official Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, including Orient House, remain closed by order of the occupying Power.

President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian officials have clearly called for respect for the sanctity of the holy sites in Jerusalem and respect for the historic status quo at the Haram al-Sharif and called for an end to the provocations, incitement and violence at, and towards, this holy site. The Palestinian side has cooperated fully with all efforts in this regard, including in particular with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in the light of its historic role in preserving and administering the Muslim and Christian holy sites in the City. The Palestinian side has raised this issue at the highest levels, both bilaterally and multilaterally, including, inter alia, in official meetings of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and other international forums, such as the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Moreover, the Palestinian side has strived repeatedly to mobilize the international community, and particularly the Security Council, to act firmly with regard to Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activities, in all manifestations, in Occupied Palestine, including in and around East Jerusalem. Since the start of 2016, repeated appeals have been made by the Palestinian leadership for the Security Council to adopt a resolution to reaffirm its established, strong position condemning Israel's settlement activities and demanding a complete halt, including in Occupied East Jerusalem, stressing both the illegality of Israel's actions in this regard and the fact that such actions are destroying the viability of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and thus constitute a major obstacle to the achievement of a peaceful solution in accordance with the long-standing, internationally endorsed parameters.

The Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations has also repeatedly highlighted this matter, also in the context of official letters to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, drawing the international community's attention to the perils of this fragile situation in Jerusalem as a result of Israel's illegal policies and practices and also because of rising extremism and provocations of Israeli settlers and religious fanatics against Palestinian civilians and against Muslim and Christian holy sites. It has caution about the far-reaching short- and long-term consequences of any further destabilization, including in the context of the acute crises, conflicts and instability throughout the region at the present time. Repeated appeals have also been made by Palestine to the international community to mobilize to help de-escalate the high tensions between the two sides, with a view to stabilizing the situation and averting greater extremism and radicalism and the outbreak of a dangerous religious conflict.

In this regard, it should be recalled that the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was first convened in 1997 to specifically address Israel's

settlement colonization and other illegal measures in Occupied East Jerusalem, particularly in the area of Jabal Abu Ghneim at the time, and has reconvened repeatedly thereafter owing to Israel's incessant violations in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The seriousness that this issue has been accorded by the international community is clearly reflected in the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which also led to the convening of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention in 1999 and 2001, and the adoption of other relevant resolutions, including resolution 70/16 of 2015.

The gravity of this issue has also been underscored by the Security Council in the past year, included in its press statement on Jerusalem of 17 September 2015, which follows its other numerous relevant pronouncements regarding Jerusalem, including, inter alia, resolutions 251 (1968), 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980), 672 (1990), 1073 (1996) and 1322 (2000). Those resolutions, which remain valid, address the continuous and systematic illegal measures and actions by Israel, the occupying Power, in the City, throughout the decades, in addition to other resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly regarding the City since 1948. This seriousness and responsibility is also reflected in the substance and solemnity of the debates on this matter, including in the Security Council, as reflected in the emergency meeting held on 16 October 2015 and the open debate on 22 October 2015, during the presidency of Spain, which elevated consideration of the matter to the ministerial level.

In this connection, we underscore the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine, including the question of the City of Jerusalem, until it is satisfactorily and justly resolved in all aspects in accordance with international law. Moreover, we recognize the importance of Jerusalem not only to the Palestinian and Israeli sides, but also to the faithful of the three monotheistic religions and the international community as a whole. Thus, as in previous resolutions, the General Assembly stressed in resolution 70/16 that "a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the City of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by people of all religions and nationalities".

It is totally unacceptable and extremely provocative that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to act in flagrant contempt and disrespect for this clear international consensus and the international legal tenets articulated above as it persists in its illegal occupation, colonization and Judaization of Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territory it has occupied since 1967, in total disregard for the applicable provisions of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel must be held accountable for its violations of international law, including the relevant United Nations resolutions. If Israel is permitted to carry out such violations and war crimes, including the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians, without consequence, such impunity will not end and will only be further emboldened, with dire impact on the humanitarian, socioeconomic, political and security situation in Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and the prospects for realizing peace and coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

The time is long overdue for the mobilization of international political will and action to pressure Israel to end its nearly half-century foreign occupation of Palestine and its cruel subjugation and oppression of the Palestinian people. Serious, responsible and urgent efforts must be exerted, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, towards ensuring Israel's complete withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem; the achievement of the two-State solution of an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders; and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including a just solution for the Palestine refugees based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In this regard, the State of Palestine welcomes the efforts exerted by France to bring together concerned States and partners in the international community in a multilateral framework of an international support group for the parties to resolve this prolonged, tragic conflict. Palestine is cooperating with efforts to this end and reiterates its call for an international peace conference as well as the commitment to negotiations to justly resolve all final status issues, including, inter alia, the issue of Jerusalem, on the basis of the relevant resolutions and the long-standing international parameters in this regard. It is hoped that such efforts will produce tangible results in the coming months to preserve the prospects for, and advance the realization of, Palestinian-Israeli peace.

Brazil

[Original: English]

In 2010, Brazil recognized the State of Palestine in its 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In accordance with Security Council resolution 478 (1980), Brazil does not recognize the city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, deems null and void the so-called "Basic Law" on Jerusalem and considers that East Jerusalem is in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Embassy of Brazil in Israel is located in Tel Aviv. In this regard, Brazilian passports issued to persons born in Jerusalem do not mention Israel as the country of birth.

Brazil does not recognize the annexation of the Golan Heights, a Syrian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 in violation of the principle of non-acquisition of land by force, a foundation of international order and of the Charter of the United Nations.

In relevant multilateral bodies, Brazil has adopted a clear stance recalling the obligations of Israel as the occupying Power according to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Brazil reiterates the illegality of the occupation under international law and Israel's obligations regarding international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Brazil has condemned, in particular, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying Power from deporting or transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

Brazil has also condemned Israel's practice of withholding Palestinian customs revenues in reprisal for Palestinian attempts to join the international community. This constitutes a violation of the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and can also be considered a form of collective punishment, which is unlawful according to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Brazilian legislative decree by which the Free Trade Agreement between Brazil and Israel was approved determined that the Government shall negotiate the "exclusion, from the Agreement's coverage, of goods whose certificates of origin attest as their origin sites under Israeli administration since 1967", which includes not only the Occupied Palestinian Territories but also the occupied Syrian Golan. This issue is currently on the agenda of the Joint Committee established under the Agreement.

The manual for Brazilian exporters to Israel published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil discourages financial transactions, investments, or any other business activities related to Israeli settlements in the Occupied Arab Territories. The document recalls Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which determined the withdrawal of Israel from those territories.

An agreement between the Institute of Mathematics and Statistics of the University of São Paulo and a higher education institution located in the Israeli settlement of Ariel, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, was not renewed owing to the understanding that the very existence of the Israeli institution resulted from a violation of international law.

The Embassy of Brazil in Tel Aviv does not recommend the holding of official meetings between Brazilian and Israeli authorities in Israeli institutions located in East Jerusalem. The Embassy also discourages any official visits of Brazilian authorities to the occupied Syrian Golan and has refused invitations by the Government of Israel to visit the region.

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]

Cuba fully supports General Assembly resolution 70/16 entitled "Jerusalem" and calls for its strict and swift implementation by all States.

A just and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict calls for the actual exercise of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to build their own State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We reiterate our condemnation of Israel's continued military occupation of the Palestinian territory; its illegal policies and colonization practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; human rights violations; and systematic war crimes that are causing the Palestinian people immense suffering.

Israel must immediately cease all colonization activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which is an integral part of this territory.

Cuba considers all Israeli measures aimed at altering the legal, geographic and demographic character and status of Jerusalem, and of the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a whole, null and void and without legal validity whatsoever.

Cuba expresses its deep concern about the physical, economic and social devastation being caused by the Israeli settlements, the wall and the network of checkpoints, which are severing the Palestinian territory into separate areas, isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory and displacing thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

The illegal Israeli colonization campaign is undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and jeopardizing the prospects of achieving a peaceful resolution on the basis of two States within the 1967 borders.

The continuation of the illegal construction of settlements is undermining the efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, and a clear challenge to United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

We demand an end to the construction and expansion of settlements and of the wall; the transfer of more settlers; the demolition of homes; the confiscation of land; the evictions; the excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem, including in its religious sites and its surroundings; the displacement of the Palestinian civilian population; the imposition of arbitrary residence requirements and restrictions of movement; and all other measures aimed at ridding the city of its Palestinian inhabitants and bringing about the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has expressed its concern about the increase in construction of Israeli settlements, the violence and terrorism of the settlers, the provocations and incitement in relation to holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, and the vandalism of mosques and churches, and warns that these acts of provocation are aggravating tensions and religious sensitivities, which could destabilize the situation.

The Movement has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Security Council to these serious issues, which are a threat to international peace and security. It has called for measures to halt Israel's incitement and provocations and ensure respect for the sacrosanct nature of religious sites and the rights and access of Muslim and Christian worshippers, including Palestinians, in the city.

Cuba reaffirms its unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and its determination to continue supporting them in their legitimate struggle for justice, dignity and peace and in defence of their inalienable right to self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba fully supports General Assembly resolution 70/17, entitled "The Syrian Golan", and calls on all States Members of the United Nations to implement it immediately and rigorously.

The Israeli decision of 14 December 1981 to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and without international legal effect, as confirmed by Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and should be rescinded.

Cuba reiterates that any measures or actions taken by Israel to alter the legal status, physical nature or demographic composition of the occupied Syrian Golan or its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to apply its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. All such measures and actions, including the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute a flagrant violation of international law, international conventions, the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions.

The international community must assume its responsibility under international law and United Nations resolutions by preventing Israel from persisting in its repeated violations, which include looting the natural resources of the occupied Syrian Golan, in violation of the principle of the permanent sovereignty of peoples under occupation over their natural resources.

Our country once again reiterates its demand that Israel comply immediately and unconditionally with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and apply them to the situation of the Syrian detainees in the occupied Syrian Golan, who are subjected to brutal practices in the prisons established by Israel during the occupation, in clear violation of international humanitarian law.

Israel must withdraw fully from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in implementation of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and its de facto annexation constitute a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

México

[Original: Spanish]

Mexico supports the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, and considers the continued measures for the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories to be acts contrary to international law that undermine the Middle East peace process.

The Government of Mexico has emphatically rejected the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan. It has therefore called on the Government of Israel to revoke such measures and avoid actions such as evictions and the demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. In the view of Mexico, these actions are contrary to international law and do not help to establish a climate conducive to the negotiation process between the two parties.

Morocco[1]

[Original: English]

The City of Al-Quds holds a special place in the hearts of Muslims all over the world because of its significance to their faith and cultural and political history.

The establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the capital of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat, in 1969, was meant to support the Palestinian cause and Al-Quds al-Sharif after an Israeli extremist set fire to parts of the Aqsa Mosque. By the same token, the establishment of the Al-Quds Committee in 1975 and entrusting its chairmanship to the King of Morocco was not a favour or prestige, but rather a great entrustment and a significant responsibility before God and history assumed by the King of Morocco, who took it upon his shoulders with faith and determination to achieve the best for Jerusalem and Jerusalemites.

To this end, OIC developed, in 1995, with a will and foresight, an institutional mechanism under the supervision of the Al-Quds Committee, namely, Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, to save East Jerusalem from obliteration of its identity, as a symbol of coexistence and peace, and to assist the Palestinian population and institutions in the Holy City. It was also entrusted with the task of supporting the steadfast Palestinians in Jerusalem and enabling the associative fabric of the city to acquire the capabilities and requirements needed for decent living therein, and thus contribute to the protection of the city and preserve the Aqsa Mosque, other holy sites, and cultural, religious and archaeological heritage. It would also help to promote the history, specificities and legal status of the city, as defined by international resolutions.

Thus, the late King Hassan II, and then King Mohammed VI of Morocco and Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, have endeavoured to promote Islamic solidarity in support of the just Palestinian cause and defence of Al-Quds, the central cause of all Muslims and the core Arab-Israeli conflict. This has always been based on invariable parameters, namely, the historical, inherent and inalienable right of Muslims to Al-Quds al-Sharif, the right of Palestinians to this holy city as the capital of their independent State, and the relevant international resolutions, particularly those stipulating that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. This has prompted adapting ways and means of action to the new developments and changing priorities and needs of Palestinians, including the population of Al-Quds.

King Mohammed VI, King of Morocco and Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, presided over its twentieth session, held over two days for the first time, on 17 and 18 January 2014 in Marrakech. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, participated in the proceedings along with, also for the first time, representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, the United Nations and the European Union.

In addition to the meeting of the Trusteeship Committee of Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the meeting of the Agency's Governing Board, comprising the ministers of finance of the States members of the Al-Quds Committee, the twentieth session featured an informal interactive session among the members of the Committee and the international figures invited. Moreover, an exhibition on the

[1] Abridged version.

achievements of the Al-Quds Committee and its executive arm, Bayt Mal Al-Quds, was organized and inaugurated by King Mohammed VI.

King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, sent a strong message, during the opening and closing sessions, against Israel's settlement policy and the repeated attempts of Israeli authorities to change the status of and Judaize the Holy City. He also announced a road map, which was unanimously accepted by Islamic countries, the United Nations and major Powers sponsoring the peace process, in order to put the process back on the right track through the practical recommendations contained in the Final Communiqué adopted by the Committee.

The salient aspects of the Final Communiqué of the twentieth session of the Al-Quds Committee:

(a) Paying tribute to the approach adopted by King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, to combine political action and positions and diplomatic efforts to underscore the legitimate rights, on the one hand, with field action on the other, through concrete projects carried out by the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency to meet the urgent recurrent humanitarian needs of Jerusalemites and to sustain their existence in the city. The Communiqué also underscored that the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency is the optimal OIC institutional mechanism and the executive arm of the Al-Quds Committee to carry out its tasks in following up the implementation of the OIC resolutions to preserve the Arab-Islamic city and its cultural heritage;

(b) Stressing the contribution of the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee to the consultations on the future of Al-Quds al-Sharif and the peace process;

(c) An equivocal condemnation of the Judaization policy of the occupation authorities in Al-Quds, which would only fuel conflict, undermine the two-State solution and feed extremism;

(d) Emphasizing the parameters of the just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine and Al-Quds al-Sharif, namely, the Arab Peace Initiative, which OIC adopted, and international resolutions on the legal status of Al-Quds al-Sharif as part of the territories occupied by Israel in 1976 and the capital of the Independent State of Palestine;

(e) Promoting awareness of the international collective responsibility towards Al-Quds and urging the international community to shoulder its full responsibility in protecting Al-Quds, its global human and cultural heritage, its educational, demographic and cultural character; and putting pressure on Israel to halt all colonial practices aimed at changing the legal status of the Holy City. This explains why the permanent members of the Security Council and major international organizations were invited, for the first time in the history of the Al-Quds Committee, to the twentieth session in Marrakech;

(f) Developing practical mechanisms to follow up and implement the resolution adopted by the Council of Foreign Ministers at its fortieth session, held in Conakry (9-11 December 2013), on an OIC plan of action for Al-Quds al-Sharif and Palestine, including contacting major Powers and some regional and international organizations to deliver, explain and support the message of OIC and the need to adopt that message. It calls for saving the Middle East, bringing peace in the region and the rest of the world through a just solution to the question of East Jerusalem

and the cause of Palestine, including all outstanding issues, in consonance with international resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative;

(g) Adopting a five-year programme of action for the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency (2014-2018) and considering the possibility of moving from voluntary contributions to mandatory contributions by States members of OIC to the Agency's budget; also paying tribute to Morocco for bearing 80 per cent of the Agency's budget.

As a result of the violations and attacks perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people, and on the instructions of King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee:

1. Morocco issued statements condemning the Israeli violations in Jerusalem, the Aqsa Mosque and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It also called on the international community and major Powers to shoulder their responsibilities to put pressure on Israel to stop its violations of international instruments and resolutions, with the caveat that the daily injustices visited on Palestinians would only lead to despair and the violent extremism that breeds terrorism;

2. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco and Heads of the Moroccan Mission to friendly countries and to regional and international organizations have made efforts to urge the officials of those countries and organizations to take action in support of Palestinian rights and preservation of the legal status of East Jerusalem as defined by relevant United Nations resolutions.

Based on the foregoing, Morocco, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, convened and hosted the first meeting of the OIC Ministerial Contact Group on the Islamic Action Plan to defend the cause of Palestine and Al-Quds, in Rabat on Wednesday, 12 November 2014, under the chairmanship of Morocco. Foreign Ministers and representatives of the other States members of the Contact Group participated in the meeting: the State of Palestine, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Guinea, Malaysia, the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Rabat meeting adopted the Contact Group's Plan of Action, which includes, inter alia, the Group's messages to major Powers to urge them to pressure Israel to halt its policy of Judaization of Al-Quds al-Sharif, which is part of Palestinian territory occupied since 1976, and to ensure that Palestinians recover their full inalienable rights.

The Plan of Action also lists the States and organizations to be visited by the members of the Ministerial Delegation, namely, the permanent members of the Security Council, States and organizations with political and economic influence in Israel (European Union, United Nations, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Japan, Canada and Australia), and States with positive developments regarding recognition of the State of Palestine (Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Ireland).

To ensure broad action by the Ministerial Contact Group, covering all geographical regions of the targeted States and organizations, it was agreed to divide the Contact Group into three delegations to deliver the OIC messages.

It was agreed that Member States within the three delegations would be represented at the ministerial level.

The General Secretariat of OIC was tasked to contact the aforementioned States and organizations to set visit dates, and notify the Member States in each delegation directly and through the permanent representatives of those Member States to OIC.

The Ministers and the Secretary-General of OIC, as members of the three delegations, have contacted the officials of a number of targeted organizations and States on various occasions, especially during their bilateral visits and meetings, but it has not been possible to hold the required consultations with the rest of the States and organizations, mainly because of scheduling conflicts. However, the Group will continue its actions and efforts to present the position of OIC, including the views and recommendations of the Al-Quds Committee.

In view of the Israeli escalation, which broke out on 13 November 2015, and the instructions of King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, Morocco organized and chaired a meeting in New York on 27 September 2015 on the sidelines of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, the Second Meeting of the OIC Ministerial Contact Group to Defend the Cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The recommendations of this meeting were adopted by the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, held in New York on 1 October 2015, including calling for a special session of the General Assembly on Palestine and Al-Quds al-Sharif.

As King Mohammed VI of Morocco is the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, Morocco is a member of the Select Arab Ministerial Group, entrusted with moving internationally to end the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, along with Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Morocco participated in five meetings of the Select Arab Ministerial Group, two of which were attended by the Foreign Minister of France. The latest meeting was held on 9 March 2016 in Cairo to discuss ways to ensure the success of the French Initiative aimed at salvaging the two-State solution, creating a new framework to support sincere and meaningful negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, and holding an international conference on Palestine and Al-Quds to end the occupation and establish a State of Palestine on its territories occupied in 1967 with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

Morocco, whose King chairs the Al-Quds Committee, was invited to participate in the expanded meeting of the Quartet on the peace efforts in the Middle East, in New York on 30 September 2015, with 16 other States — the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Russian Federation, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Croatia, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia — along with the Secretary-General of the

United Nations, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The participation of Morocco, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, in that meeting was commended by the participating States and organizations, constituting the stakeholders or the "International Support Group", which France counts on to support and boost the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, under its initiative, aimed at reviving the peace process, based on the two-State solution and on organizing an international conference to that end before the end of 2016.

In pursuance of an approach combining political and diplomatic mobilization at all levels with tangible and meaningful fieldwork to face up to the Israeli policy of changing realities on the ground and imposing a fait accompli, conscious of the fragile social and economic status of Al-Quds, and in order to support the steadfastness of Jerusalemites, the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency has pursued a comprehensive strategy of action. This strategy is implemented in phases through systematic work programmes. The most recent of those programmes is the Five-Year Work Programme of 2014-2018, with a US$ 30 million budget, adopted by the Al-Quds Committee at its twentieth session, held in Marrakech on 17 and 18 January 2014, under the presidency of King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Committee.

The Programme comprises projects to enable Jerusalemites to build capacity and acquire the skills required to improve their livelihood and preserve their dignity so that they can stay in their city and protect the Aqsa Mosque, its holy sites and cultural, religious and archaeological heritage as well as promote its history, specificities and legal status defined by international resolutions.

Like its predecessors, the Five-Year Programme was prepared based on a realistic vision premised on long experience and practice in the field and taking into account the actual support that can be rendered and consequent deliverables on the ground for Palestinians.

The Kingdom of Morocco bears more than 85 per cent of the budget, which allows the Agency to continue to exist and carry out its projects, not because it is Moroccan but rather because King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, and the Moroccan people as a whole are committed to, and will remain committed to, working in the field for the benefit of Jerusalemites and Palestinians.

The door is open to all who wish to benefit from the rich field experience of the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, the database it has set up, the needs it has assessed, and its credibility with Jerusalemites and others. The Agency belongs to all, and all States members of OIC, from a collective responsibility perspective, should support and use it to serve Al-Quds, its people and all Muslims whose hearts are eager for the first Qiblah and the third holiest mosque.

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

[Original: Spanish]

Since the start of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has supported the formula of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. This is the ideal path to attain the goal of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that

will allow the Palestinian people to realize its legitimate and inalienable right to self-determination.

Consequently, Venezuela has given its unconditional support to Palestine's position in the talks, namely, a negotiated political solution in which both countries are recognized within clear, defined and secure borders; the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, from south Lebanon and from the Golan Heights in Syria; and the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, such as General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

To that end, Venezuela has consistently advocated a resumption of efforts towards negotiations as the only possible mechanism to attain peace in the Middle East region. It has repeatedly stated this position in the major international forums, such as the United Nations and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, among other regional and multilateral forums.

For the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the capital of Palestine is East Jerusalem, which was occupied in 1967. Acknowledging this is integral to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which must be fully exercised.

Jerusalem also has a very special historic, cultural and religious significance. That is why Venezuela has called for respect for the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif, both in word and in deed, urging all parties to work together immediately to ease tensions and to put an end to all provocation, incitement and acts of violence at the holy sites in the city. Venezuela also considers that the State of Israel, the occupying Power, must cease and refrain from unilaterally imposing its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem, since its actions are illegal, null and void and have no validity whatsoever.

To support these appeals, Venezuela has always called for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, which can only be achieved through a two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian State recognized and accepted as a State Member of the United Nations. In that regard, Venezuela has supported the efforts of the Quartet and the existing peace plans, and has considered such initiatives as the French proposal for an international conference to serve as the basis for a resumption of the peace process to be constructive and worthy of support.

It is worth noting that, during its presidency of the Security Council in February 2016, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela supported meetings on various aspects of the Palestinian question, condemning illegal Israeli settlements and land confiscations in the occupied territories, and the humanitarian situation, especially with regard to children. Following its presidency of the Council, Venezuela has given its backing to proposals related to this issue, and has been willing to support initiatives to protect the civilian population in the occupied territories and possible options to establish a protection system. Venezuela has also played an active role in meetings of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (of which it has been a member State since September 2010), most recently at the international conference on the 2030 Agenda and Palestine.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has repeatedly and consistently called on the Government of the State of Israel to resume peace talks with the Syrian Arab Republic with a view to its withdrawal as the occupying Power from the territory of the Syrian Golan, which it has illegally occupied for almost 50 years.

Such calls have been made to support Syria's sovereign rights over the occupied Syrian Golan on the basis of the purposes and principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and in particular the terms of reference of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid peace process and the principle of land for peace and in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 467 (1980) and 497 (1981), regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. In that regard, in addition to its statements in its national capacity in the United Nations General Assembly, the Security Council and the various organs of the international system, Venezuela has also endorsed the statements made by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on this delicate matter, and in various regional and multilateral forums.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to express its concern at the lack of commitment and political will on the part of the Government of the State of Israel to put an end to the escalating violence in the occupied Syrian Golan and in the occupied Palestinian territories, and its continuing disregard for international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

This prolonged situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has very severe consequences. The occupying Power must stop exploiting and damaging natural resources and engaging in activities that harm service infrastructure and the environment which, in turn, threaten the quality of soil and plant and animal life, thereby seriously affecting the lives of the inhabitants and the ecosystem of the region. In that regard, Venezuela hopes that when the peace talks between the parties are resumed, these issues are addressed so that they might be resolved in a just manner for all those affected.

In addition to this prolonged situation, Venezuela notes that the internal armed conflict that has been affecting Syria for five and a half years has been having a negative impact on the necessary resumption of efforts aimed at resuming peace talks between the State of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, while the Government of President Bashar al-Assad has been making every effort to counter the activities of the armed opposition and terrorist groups that are seeking to remove him from power. The State of Israel as an occupying Power has taken advantage of this situation to delay the resumption of peace talks.